

The secret to using tenses in scientific writing



1 Introduction

Use the **simple present tense** for -

- your objectives behind conducting the study
- literature that is already known about the topic
- facts that are generally true and unlikely to change [Ex: The Earth *revolves* around the sun.]
- results of past research that you believe to be true and relevant to your present research



Use the **simple past tense** for -

- facts that were once believed to be true but have since been revoked [Ex: Bats *were thought* to be blind.]
- describing the methods of previous studies

Literature Review 2



Use the **simple past tense** to talk about existing research on the topic. But sometimes you may need to use a combination of tenses.

- Use the **past tense** - to focus on the study itself or on the authors of the study
- Use the **present tense** - to share your own views about the study in question
- Use the **present perfect tense** - to cite a previous study that is fairly recent [Ex: Recent studies *have shown* that...], or to make generalizations about past research in an area [Ex: Several researchers *have studied* these stimuli....]

3 Materials & Methods

- Use the **simple past tense** - to describe your actions i.e. what you did and how you did it, as these actions have already been completed at the time of writing the research paper.
- Use the **past perfect tense** - only as needed, to describe some earlier stages of the experimental procedure [Ex: Subjects who *had been* assigned to the control group were given a placebo instead of Drug A.]



Results Section 4



- Use the **past tense** - to describe experiments that have already been completed at the time of writing the paper
- Use the **present tense** - to refer to tables, figures & graphs that you use to present the results [Ex: Fig. 3 *shows* that...]
- You could also use it to talk about your research paper as a whole [Ex: Section 4.1 *discusses*...]

5 Discussion Section

- Use the **past tense** - to summarize findings
- Use the **present tense** - to interpret the results, discuss the significance of the findings or present your conclusions
- Use the **future tense** - to make recommendations for further research or to indicate a future course of action based on the results of your paper

